

Message Text

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PAGE 01 RABAT 00858 160836Z
ACTION NEA-07

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INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
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USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 0858

LIMDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS SECRETARY'S PARTY

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PFOR SS MO
SUBJECT: KING DISCUSSES AREA TENSIONS

1. DURING FEB 14 MEETING WITH KING HASSAN, I ASKED FOR HIS
VIEWS ON THE SAHARA ISSUE. HE RESPONDED IN VERY RELAXED FASHION,
NOTING THE POLISARIO WAS NO LONGER A PROBLEM AS IT HAD VIRTUALLY
DISAPPEARED AS A GUERRILLA FORCE. IN ITS PLACE, MERCENARIES
FROM MALI, CHAD AND NIGER, LED BY ALGERIANS, WERE DOING THE
FIGHTING. KING GAVE THE IMPRESSION HE CONSIDERED THIS A
RELATIVELY SHORT-TERM PROBLEM AS THE ALGERIANS WERE HAVING
CONSIDERABLE PROBLEMS WITH MALI AND CHAD OVER RECRUITING
UNSUSPECTING TRIBESMEN FROM THESE TWO COUNTRIES. AS FOR EXAGGERATED
REPORTS FROM ALGERIA ON MILITARY SITUATION, LOW MORALE OF
MOROCCAN MILITARY AND LACK OF MOROCCAN CONTROL OF AREA, HE SAID
HE WOULD BE HAPPY TO HAVE SECRETARY SEND WHOMEVER HE WISHED
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PAGE 02 RABAT 00858 160836Z

ANYWHERE IN THE SAHARA TO GET THE FACTS AS THEY ARE.

2. KING ALSO MENTIONED MAJOR IRON ORE DEPOSITS INSIDE THE
SAHARA. THE SPANISH HAD DISCOVERED ONE BEFORE THEY WITHDREW.
SINCE THEN, HIS GEOLOGISTS HAD FOUND TWO MORE. THERE WAS AN
ESTIMATED TOTAL OF AT LEAST A BILLION TONS INSIDE THE MOROCCAN
SAHARA, WITH SOME DEPOSITS

LOCATED ONLY 80 KMS FROM THE SEA. IF MOROCCO WERE ABLE TO ESTABLISH A STEEL COMPLEX IN THE AREA, IT MIGHT SUPPORT AS MANY AS 14 THOUSAND RESIDENTS. THIS IN TURN WOULD ALTER THE SAHARANS' NOMADIC WAY OF LIFE AND CONTRIBUTE TO STABILITY. KING SAID HE WANTED A LARGE, REPUTABLE U.S. FIRM TO ASSIST IN EXPLOITING THIS WEALTH, NOTING IN PASSING THAT A U.S. COMMERCIAL PRESENCE WOULD OBVIOUSLY HELP HIS POSITION IN THE SAHARA.

3. TURNING TO MAURITANIA, THE KING DESCRIBED THE SITUATION AS A "HEAVY BURDEN" FOR HIM. HE DEPLORED CURRENT TALK OF FEDERATION, AND CLAIMED THAT THE MAURITANIANS WERE PUSHING HIM VERY HARD IN THAT DIRECTION. HE, HOWEVER, WAS HOLDING BACK. MOROCCO ALREADY HAD 3,000 TROOPS IN MAURITANIA, ALONG WITH A GREAT DEAL OF EQUIPMENT. MOROCCO, HE ADDED, WAS CARRYING THE WEST'S BURDEN "FROM TANGIER TO PORT LOUIS" BUT COULD NOT DO EVERYTHING, OTHERS WOULD HAVE TO HELP.

4. COMMENT: IF THE REPORT OF SIZABLE IRON ORE DEPOSITS IS TRUE, THE MOROCCANS ARE LIABLE TO BE LESS INTERESTED THAN HITHERTO IN THE UNIMPLEMENTED AGREEMENT INITIALED WITH ALGERIA IN 1972 (IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE BORDER AGREEMENT) FOR JOINT EXPLORATION OF IRON ORE DEPOSITS ON THE ALGERIAN SIDE. THIS AGREEMENT, WHICH ALSO CALLED FOR EXPORT OF THE MINERALS TO THE SEA THROUGH MOROCCO, HAS USUALLY BEEN ONE OF THE KEY ELEMENTS OF PROPOSALS FOR SOLUTION OF MOROCCAN-ALGERIAN DIFFERENCES.

ANDERSON

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED SECRETARY'S PARTY
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PAGE 03 RABAT 00858 160836Z

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